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5 Minutes for a Brighter Future

In many ways youth today face unprecedented challenges. Higher college costs, an increasingly competitive job market, and less stable home environments all provide unique tests.

Recent studies suggest it is not uncommon for kids to spend over 50 hours a week with various types of electronic media. They are inundated with messages from time spent on Facebook, texting, television and the internet. Time online is going up, and time with families is being lost.

Adding to this is the mixed messages from growing public opinion that some drugs are okay and should be legal to use. Too often, youth fall into peer pressure and experiment with drugs which can lead to life-long reductions in the ability to earn good wages, create meaningful relationships and lead productive lives. It doesn't have to be this way.

The reality is that positive trends exist, but we are missing a major opportunity to drop drug abuse rates and increase the vibrancy of our state and nation. It starts early-- in the family and it's free.

Fewer teens are starting to smoke and their rejection of drinking and driving is up. More young people have made healthier decisions about their future, partly because parents and policymakers have reinforced the message that these behaviors are unacceptable.

Still, challenges exist. Drugs are becoming more prevalent in society and associated dangers are increasing. For example, prescription pain killer abuse has become a nationwide problem. According to the Partnership at Drugfree.org, one in four teens nationally reported intentionally misusing prescription drugs to get high. 70% of people abusing these drugs obtained them from family or friends.

Teens today more often report that marijuana is safe, and that access to the drug is easy. Teens who become regular users of marijuana or prescription pain killers are much more likely to go on to become users of other drugs like cocaine and heroin.

Parents assume they have had a meaningful conversation with their children about the dangers of drug abuse. In a recent survey, nearly 80% said their child understood they didn't want them to experiment with drugs. When children were asked, only 20% agreed that their parents had a specific conversation with them about drugs.

We also know that when a parent or other important adult figure in a child's life takes time to discuss the negative effects of drug abuse that child is 50% less likely to experiment with drugs. Research suggests if kids stay drug free until age 21, they are almost guaranteed to never abuse drugs as adults.

Conversations don't have to be an uncomfortable lecture or based on complex science. Simply "take 5" minutes to discuss your hopes for their future, to reinforce the attitude that drugs are

dangerous and would likely detract from their ability to reach their goals. It can be done at the kitchen table or on the way to a ballgame.

Many times parents think they may not be able to answer questions that come up. The truth is, you are not expected to be an expert on the subject. Clarifying your values in a direct conversation leaves little room for misunderstanding. To help prepare you can visit the website www.drugfreeiowa.org or www.timetotalk.org for helpful tips and information to share with your kids.

Kids are inundated today with conflicting messages from many sources. A five minute conversation can break through all the noise and set them on a path to a better life.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Steven F. Lukan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.